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**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation respecting  
its  
participation at the CPA Election Seminar for the Parliament  
of Guyana and the Capacity Building  
Programme Workshop for Committee Chairs and Clerks**

**Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary  
Association (CPA)**

**Georgetown, Guyana  
March 31 – April 6, 2016**

## **Report**

A delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association attending the CPA Election Seminar for the Parliament of Guyana from March 31 to April 1, 2016 and the Capacity Building Programme Workshop for Committee Chairs and Clerks from April 4 to 6, 2016, has the honour to present its Report.

The Election Seminar was organized by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Secretariat. Those delegates participating from the Canadian Branch of the CPA were the Honourable David Smith, Senator, Rodger Cuzner, M.P. and Chandra Arya, M.P. The Capacity Building Workshop for Committee Chairs and Clerks was organized in conjunction with the CPA-UK Branch of the Westminster Parliament. Those delegates participating from the Canadian Branch of the CPA were the Honourable Anne Cools, Senator, Yasmin Ratansi, M.P. and Chair of the Canadian Branch of the CPA, Rodger Cuzner, M.P. and Chandra Arya, M.P. The delegations for both workshops were assisted by Elizabeth Kingston, Executive Secretary of the Canadian Branch of the CPA.

### **Election Seminar – March 31 – April 1, 2016:**

#### **Session 1: The Development of the Commonwealth and the Role of CPA**

This session provided an overview of the unique quality of the Commonwealth; its principles and values and the Declarations on which it is built. The session also provided a background to the CPA and its history; its role as a professional development body; the Annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference; Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and its unique convening power, shared values and outreach work.

#### **Session 2: Parliamentary Procedures and Practices with Specific Reference to Motions, Resolutions and Bills**

This session provided a background to the role of the Speaker, Leader of the House and Whips; bills and passage of legislation; Government Business; Private Members' Business; Motions; Questions; Statements; Adjournment; Conventions and Practices, including the sharing of good practices from across other Commonwealth Jurisdictions.

#### **Session 3: Parliament, Democracy and Civil Society**

This session discussed the meaning of being an elected representative: representing constituents; the relationship between Parliament and the people; the Office of the Ombudsman; bringing young people into the parliamentary process; and parliamentary outreach work. Rodger Cuzner, M.P. acted as a resource person for this session, and expanded on his experience as Opposition Whip in the previous Parliament.

#### **Session 4: Party Organization within Parliament**

This session dealt with the role of the Governing Party; the role of the Opposition; how parties organize their own Members; the role of Members within their parties; co-operation between parties to create an effective and functional parliamentary environment; services for Parliamentarians as well as the influence of backbenchers on the Executive. Both Senator Smith and Rodger Cuzner acted as resource persons for this session.

### **Session 5: The Roles and Responsibilities of Members of Parliament and the Opposition**

This session was concerned with the roles and responsibilities of an MP; the role as a representative of constituents; the role of legislator, including that of either supporting or criticizing government proposals. Chandra Arya, M.P., Rodger Cuzner, M.P. and Senator David Smith all drew upon their own experiences as legislators for this session.

### **Session 6: Administration and Financing of Parliament**

The session examined the concept of financial autonomy for legislatures and internal governance structures and prevailing relationships with the Executive, including the use of good practices in ensuring the independence, effectiveness and accountability of Parliament; the importance of independent funding for Parliament and financial controls and Parliament as a corporate body. The role of Officers of Parliament including that of the Auditor General in the oversight of the Assembly was also discussed.

### **Session 7: Improving the Role and Operation of Parliamentary Committees**

The issues raised were the following: scrutiny of the Executive; working by consensus; procedures to receive public inputs and advice of experts; selection of chairpersons and members; Committee structure in unicameral Parliaments; Financial Scrutiny, the financial supervision of the Executive; the budgetary cycle, and finally the role of the Public Accounts Committee and the Auditor General.

### **Session 8: Financial Scrutiny: An Examination of the Annual Estimates of Expenditure, the Role of the Parliamentary Budget Office**

This session dealt with the topic of parliamentary scrutiny of public spending as a vital mechanism for holding Governments and other providers of public services account for the taxpayers' dollars. Included as well were the evolution of the parliamentary financial scrutiny process and the role of the Parliamentary Budget Office as an independent financial institution.

### **Session 9: Principles of Public Life; and Privilege and Members' Interests**

This session discussed the role of Members of Parliament as public officers and as such, their requirement to act in the best interest of the nation, province, state or

territory concerned. Also discussed was their fiduciary relationship with the citizens on whose behalf they act with the responsibility to uphold the common interest of the citizens.

This session also covered Parliament's rights to control its internal procedures, including safeguards to conduct business without interference as well as collective and individual protection and breaches of privilege.

### **Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development**

The delegation had the opportunity, between the two scheduled workshops, to travel to the interior of Guyana, specifically to the Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development. The Centre was established in 1996 under a joint mandate from the Government of Guyana and the Commonwealth Secretariat to manage the Iwokrama forest, a unique reserve of 371,000 hectares of rainforest, so as to lead to lasting ecological, economic and social benefits to the people of Guyana and to the world in general. It should be noted that Guyana as a country has the highest forestation coverage of any other country in the world at 77.5%.

The Centre works in close collaboration with the Government of Guyana, the Commonwealth and other international partners to develop new approaches to enable countries with rainforests to earn significant income from eco-system services and creative conservation practice.

### **Capacity Building Workshop for Committee Chairs and Clerks – April 4 -6, 2016**

**Objective 1:** Enhance a broader understanding of the key features and functions of parliamentary committees in holding government to account.

**Objective 2:** Explore the role, responsibilities and relationships of Committee Chairs, Members and Clerks in operating an effective committee.

**Objective 3:** Develop practical skills in conducting an inquiry; identifying witnesses, making best use of evidence, public engagement and reporting.

**Objective 4:** Discuss the limitations of conducting efficient policy and financial oversight through the committee system.

**Objective 5:** Share experiences of the challenges of operating a committee system within the context of a coalition government.

The Workshop was designed to enhance the capacity of parliamentary committees in Guyana to best exercise their oversight and scrutiny functions in holding the Executive to account. Through briefings, workshop sessions and roundtable discussions with parliamentary colleagues, Chairs and Clerks were able to identify key areas in which to develop committee processes and outputs. The Workshop also gave Members and Clerks from Guyana, Canada and the United Kingdom the opportunity to develop networks to enable a continued support and collaboration beyond the duration of the Workshop.

## **Session 1: Balancing the Executive and the Legislature: The Role of Parliamentary Committees in Holding the Executive to Account**

The session dealt with the powers of committees and especially the question of how they can best support the oversight function of Parliament; the role of committees in overseeing policy, administration, and expenditure as well as the importance of representation/chairmanship and the required expertise of all committee staff, including the Clerk and researchers assigned.

## **Session 2: Committees in Action: Case Studies from the Parliaments of Guyana, Canada and UK**

This session dealt with the major challenges to effective committee functioning in each of the three Parliaments represented, including the issue of how Members balance party affiliation and their role on the committee.

Moreover the issue of coalition governments and its unique effect on the functioning of committees and respective Chairs was discussed.

## **Session 3: Improving the Efficiency and Effectiveness of Parliamentary Committees**

This session dealt with the subject of Committee resources and how best to operate when resources are limited. The matter of consensus building and assessing respective committee mandates was also discussed during this session.

## **Session 4: Resources and Administration**

This session explored the support provided by staff in order to ensure, while balancing a lack of resources and efficiency, adequate resource allocation. The discussion included the support available to Members through their own office staff as well as committee staff and the relationship between Committee Members and Staff.

## **Session 5: Managing Committee Business**

The session dealt with the issue that members of the National Assembly of Guyana are part time and balance parliamentary responsibilities with external employment. In this respect, the issue of managing the committee's work while taking into account Members time constraints was discussed. In the area of information management the question of the provision of both verbal and written briefs as well as the expectations for information sharing for Members and the duty of Clerks to provide such briefing material was raised.

## **Session 6: Conducting an Effective Inquiry**

The session dealt with the selection of inquiry subjects and assessing the timing of such inquiries. Included in the discussion was the sourcing of witnesses including the selection of sector specialists, academics as well as those from civil society.

### **Session 7: Conducting inquiries: Effective Questioning**

This session discussed the usefulness of effective questioning, suggesting that effective questioning increases the quality of briefing papers, witness statements and subsequent committee reports. The issue of how to formulate effective questions was discussed and participants had the opportunity to practise this in a mock committee set-up. Included in the discussion was the question of how to make the best from witnesses' evidence while bridging the gap between the information needed and the information available.

### **Session 8: Producing Reports with Impact**

The session centred on the discussion of report writing, examining the question of how to create an effective committee report with tangible recommendations for Government. Included were the expectations for the Chair, Members and Clerks in developing the committee report. The use of minority reports at times was also discussed. Another issue raised was how to deal with a lack of responsiveness from the Government to recommendation put forth by the committee in its report.

### **Session 9: Public Outreach for Committees**

The session explored the relationship between Parliament, People and the Media and how the latter can be used to strengthen Parliament's role in oversight. The discussion more specifically centred on the methods used by committees to engage the public in order to create an awareness of calls for evidence, committee reports and governments responses. Also discussed was the role of social media in committee work, including creating access to groups not traditionally engaged with Parliament.

In conclusion, the delegates would like to express their appreciation to the Canadian High Commissioner, Pierre Giroux and High Commission staff for their invaluable support while attending these two workshops. In addition the delegation would like to acknowledge the work of the Parliamentary Research Branch of the Library of Parliament for the excellent background information they prepared for the use of the delegation during the Conference.

Respectfully submitted,

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi, M.P.  
Chair of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth  
Parliamentary Association (CPA)



## **Travel Costs**

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	CPA Election Seminar for the Parliament of Guyana and the Capacity Building Programme Workshop for Committee Chairs and Clerks
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Georgetown, Guyana
<b>DATES</b>	March 31 to April 6, 2016
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
SENATE	Hon. Ann Cools, Senator Hon. David Smith, Senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Ms. Yasmin Ratansi, M.P. Mr. Chandra Arya, M.P. Mr. Rodger Cuzner, M.P.
STAFF	Ms. Elizabeth Kingston, Association Secretary
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	\$22,827.97
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	\$9,703.33
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	\$1,597.48
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	\$4,797.96
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	\$1,107.67
<b>MISCELLANEOUS</b>	\$1,687.91
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$41,722.32</b>